

Columbia University  
in the City of New York

NEW YORK 27, N. Y.

PRESIDENT'S ROOM

June 7, 1949

Dear Congressman Gwinn:

Preoccupations with Commencement and related duties have prevented me from sending an earlier answer to your letter of May 28th. Even with Commencement out of the way I have an accumulation of engagements and commitments that piled up on me during my three months enforced absence due to illness and the performance of duties in Washington. As a matter of fact, I have not yet been able to find the leisure necessary for a thorough reading of the Federal aid bill and Congressman John W. Byrne's testimony which you sent me.

Consequently I hope that you will not find it necessary for me to appear before your Committee. There is the further consideration that I have been connected with the educational world only a relatively short time and even during the past year have been able to give only a portion of my attention to it and its manifold aspects. Undoubtedly there are many others whose views would be far more valuable to the Committee than mine, especially where those views deal with details of proposed methods and procedures.

However, in my own mind I am perfectly clear as to basic principle and have more than once made public statements to the effect that I definitely oppose every unnecessary intervention of the Federal Authority and the Federal Treasury in what should be local business and local responsibility.

I am well aware that there are certain sections of this country where the tax revenue potential of each will not provide for all of the children in that area that level of education deemed generally required in discharging the duties of enlightened electorate.

In such areas I would heartily support Federal aid, under formulas that would permit no abuse, no direct interference of the Federal authority in educational processes and no opportunity to expand the flow of Federal money into areas where need could not be clearly demonstrated. I would flatly oppose any grant by the Federal government to all states in the union for educational purposes. Such policy would create an ambition--almost a requirement--to spend money freely under the impulse of competition with other localities in the country. It would completely decry and defeat the watchful economy that comes about through local supervision over local

expenditures of local revenues.

In short, unless we are careful, even the great and necessary educational processes in our country will become yet another vehicle by which the believers in paternalism, if not outright socialism, will gain still additional power for the central government.

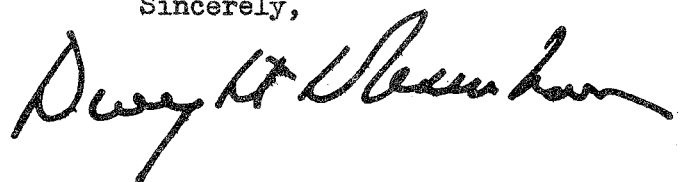
In no way should my position be interpreted to mean that I am opposed to Federal contractual arrangements with schools for scientific research which is essential to the public interest. Federal government support of such ventures, and even certain types of fellowships and scholarships to meet unusual Federal requirements, would not weaken local government or sap community enterprise. These specific items are a far cry from a blanket usurpation of local responsibility and obligation.

The completely spurious argument is frequently advanced that because the Federal government skims off so much of the available tax revenue it must, as a consequence, bear more of the local expenditure. This is putting the cart before the horse. If local communities do their job then there will be no need for additional centralized revenues for nation-wide subsidies of an essentially local character; and we will avoid the certain pitfalls of extreme centralization.

Very frankly I firmly believe that the army of persons who urge greater and greater centralization of authority and greater and greater dependence upon the Federal Treasury are really more dangerous to our form of government than any external threat that can possibly be arrayed against us. I realize that many of the people urging such practice attempt to surround their particular proposal with fancied safeguards to protect the future freedom of the individual. My own conviction is that the very fact that they feel the need to surround their proposal with legal safeguards is in itself a cogent argument for the defeat of the proposal.

If you feel that your Committee would seriously like to have my own simple views upon this important matter, I have no objection whatsoever to your using this letter for that purpose. I so earnestly believe in the need for education, I so earnestly believe that a thorough education is the best assurance we can provide that our American free system shall endure, that I don't want to see the educational processes used directly or indirectly to weaken that free system.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Dwight D. Eisenhower". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, sweeping "D" at the beginning and a long, horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Honorable Ralph W. Gwinn  
House of Representatives  
Washington, D. C.